

LIVING AMERICAN COMPOSERS: A PERFORMANCE APPROACH TO ANALYSIS AND
PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATION OF SELECTED 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN SOLO
VOCAL MUSIC

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF MUSIC

BY

GIUSTINO P. CARRANO

DR. KATHLEEN MAURER - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

August 2018

LIVING AMERICAN COMPOSERS: A PERFORMANCE APPROACH TO ANALYSIS AND PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATION OF SELECTED 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN SOLO VOCAL MUSIC

Since the beginning of the modern era, there has been a progressive lack of new vocal music represented in vocal pedagogy, and especially the vocal studio. Today, it is common for many pedagogues and performers to primarily focus on vocal repertoire from the 18th and 19th centuries, ignoring the works of contemporary composers. As a result, there is a void in 21st-century vocal literature that leaves students with little understanding of the works of our time. The aim of this project is to study and introduce a selection of contemporary art songs that can be added to the body of vocal literature available for the purpose of technique development, and to encourage the inclusion of contemporary pieces in the vocal studio and classroom. The great pedagogue of Bel Canto technique, Giovanni Battista Lamperti, taught that a student should not move on to song and aria until he or she had mastered the technique of singing, thus having a student sing nothing but vocalises for, in some cases, four to five years.¹ Though we as pedagogues might agree that the mastery of the vocal mechanism is paramount, in today's academic and performance climate it is not feasible to follow Lamperti's method with orthodox strictness. Therefore, current vocal pedagogues and teachers of singing will use repertoire to teach specific techniques and styles while focusing on the development of the vocal mechanism. It is from this platform and custom that we champion the application of these contemporary composers and songs into the vocal studio.

¹ Giovanni Battista Lamperti, *Vocal wisdom: maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1931), 1.

The composers and compositions that will be discussed in this paper include Dr. Joseph T. Spaniola and his set titled *Letters from a Friend*, Dr. Jeremy Ribando and his pieces “Academic” and “The Cycle,” Dr. Jody Nagel and his *Six Epitaphs* and *Four Songs for Seth*, and Gene Scheer and his pieces “At Howard Hawks’ House” and “Omaha Beach” from *Voices from World War II*. Spaniola is credited for his work with the U.S. Air Force Band and his wind ensemble compositions, such as *Escapade*, however he has published works in nearly all genres and instrumentation, and is highly sought after for commissions and as a clinician. Ribando has an extensive background in vocal music and is known for his orchestral compositions; he is still highly active as a soloist as well as a composer in demand. Nagel represents the cumulative diversity of composers, with successful compositions in many genres and a strong presence in vocal music. He is a highly-sought-after composer with a strong international presence. Scheer is primarily known as the librettist for the operas of composer Jake Heggie; however, he is making a name for himself as a composer of vocal repertoire.

This research, in addition to a performance analysis, also includes a personal interview with the composers.² These interviews provide biographical information about the composers and give insight into their compositional techniques, influences, and thoughts in regard to these specific pieces. The interview portion with the composers covers four major subjects. The first topic addresses the historical and musical background of the composer. Second, the composer speaks about his musical influences, and how these influences affected the style and form of his work. Third, in the interest of genre, I have asked the composer’s opinion about where he feels his compositions fit. Finally, the composer was asked to define any specific performance

² The interviews used in this creative project were approved and conducted as part of a Ball State University Aspire Creative Arts Grant during 2014.

expectations within the piece. These inquiries provided information that is necessary to successfully present these works and composers as an important part of the scholarly record for application in performance and vocal pedagogy.

I became interested in this area of research after my personal exploration into the works of contemporary composers, as well as the experience of working with them. I also found that many of my young vocal artist colleagues did not have a strong foundation in new music, and did not have knowledge of new vocal repertoire. However, many of my colleagues in the instrumental world had a much stronger understanding of the contemporary composers of their instrument. Additionally, I have found that when you speak to many vocalists regarding modern music, they reference the early to middle twentieth-century works of composers such as Vaughan Williams.

This study is of great importance and relevance to the vocal community because of the nature of musical study and its inherent need for continuous progression and growth. This study will serve multiple roles in educating pedagogues and pupils, bridging the gap for contemporary music study and application, and building the foundation for continued development and support for contemporary vocal music. The ultimate goal is to lay the groundwork for contemporary vocal music to be considered on a par with *lieder*, *mélodie*, and art song of previous centuries in our modern vocal study and performance.

The following sections will comprise a brief biographical introduction to the composers studied in this project and whose compositions were presented in recital on the 27th of September 2014, and a performance analysis of a selection of these pieces. This paper will serve as an introduction to more in-depth study with analysis of select pieces from the project, and brief

introductions of others. The scope and influence of this study is in a constant state of growth and evolution as mirrored by the growth and evolution of contemporary vocal music.

Joseph T. Spaniola: *Letters from a Friend*

Joseph T. Spaniola (b. 1963) is a composer on a passionate quest to engage the hearts and minds of audiences and performers through the communicative power of music.³ Spaniola received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Composition from the University of North Texas under the tutelage of Cindy McTee; his Master of Music in Composition and Bachelor of Music in Theory and Composition degrees were awarded by Michigan State University, where he studied with Jere Hutcheson, Charles Ruggiero, and James Niblock. Additionally, he studied composition with Sam Headrick at Boston University. Spaniola's compositions have earned him a wide range of accolades and appointments. He is currently the Director of Theory and Jazz Studies at The University of West Florida, and previously served as Chief Arranger and Composer for the U.S. Air Force Academy Band. Compositions of his have been performed and recorded across the United States and stretching worldwide; he has been commissioned to write vocal works for renowned performers such as American soprano Reneé Fleming.

Letters from a Friend is a set of three art songs written by Spaniola; he is also the author of the text in these works. Each letter was written at a different time in Spaniola's life, each in an influential moment to him personally.⁴ The first song of the cycle, "Sleepless Nights," comes from a time in the composer's life when he suffered from insomnia. The second song, "The Journey," recounts the composer's experience climbing a mountain in the Alps while on tour as a member of the American Youth Orchestra. The third song, "A Hope for Tomorrow," is a letter

³ Joseph T. Spaniola, "Brief Biography," <http://www.josephspaniola.com/> [accessed January 7, 2018.]

⁴ Joseph T. Spaniola, interview by author, Pensacola, FL, April 12, 2014.

from the time when the composer was living in Boston. The physical demands of this set are vast, the range is A2 to E4. The vocal momentum is overall consistent, but has excellent fluctuations for the purpose of text painting. Each of the three movements begins textually in a very similar way, however, musically they are defined in very different forms representing the emotion and state of mind of the character. They are incredible representations of the humanity found in three different emotions: frustration, elation, and introspection. There are many possible applications with these songs in the vocal studio, such as work with syncopation, chromaticism, meter and tempi difficulties, melismatic lines, broad dynamic contrast, unsettled accompaniment, and many others. This set is without question reserved for the advanced vocalist and some intermediate students – a phenomenal challenge, but worth the work and investment.

Jeremy Ribando: “Academic” and “The Cycle”

Jeremy Ribando (b. 1973) is an accomplished tenor soloist as well as a published composer. He received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Michigan State University, and holds composition and theory degrees from Cornerstone University and Western Michigan University. Dr. Ribando is an award-winning composer who has been recognized by such groups as the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP); Yamaha; The Boeing Corporation; and the Michigan Arts Council.⁵ His compositions have been commissioned and premiered by many illustrious universities, orchestras, and organizations including but not limited to Michigan State University, Grand Rapids Symphony, and Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. He has worked with many great American composers, including Ricky Ian Gordon, William Bolcoln, and Charles Ruggiero. As a vocalist he has worked with Delta David Gier and Stanley

⁵Jeremy Ribando, “Faculty Bio,” <http://nwfraiders.org/faculty/profiles/ribando-jeremy/> [accessed February 7, 2018.]

Kolk. Ribando is currently the Chair of the Humanities, Fine & Performing Arts Division at Northwest Florida State College where he teaches voice, music theory, and music technology.

Ribando's "Academic" is a brilliant example of a modern art song; it is a comedic work, however, the compositional setting shows serious musical clarity. This is evident in the dual feeling found in the opening section, and the stylistic demands of the vocalist and pianist. The text chosen for this song is a poem by American poet Theodore Roethke; it is a satirical prose depicting the loathsome fear of growing old. Ribando opens the piece with a dramatic driving line reminiscent of Schubertian lieder. Beginning in c minor the first two phrases are comprised of full driving chords, followed by a cadence on a dramatic flourishing seventh chord, which builds the sense of an impending story of "Erlkönig"⁶ proportions. As the listener is swept up into this short introduction Ribando holds interest with the use of a sustained B-flat tone, the *tonic* of our new key. Greeted with a four-measure phrase of galloping chords in a slower tempo, the audience's mind is still captivated with dramatic anticipation. This is further enabled by the vocalist's dramatic presence and presentation. The opening line, "The Stethoscope," is performed in an almost *colla voce* style, with a serious classical feeling⁷ (Example 1).

Example 1: "Academic" – mm. 14-16

The musical score for Example 1: "Academic" – mm. 14-16, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a half note "The" (mf), followed by a half note "steth" (mp), and then a half note "e" (mp). The piano accompaniment consists of a series of chords. The second system shows the vocal line with a half note "scope," (spoken slightly hushed with a measure of incredulity), followed by a half note "the stethoscope...?" (yeah, the stethoscope.). The piano accompaniment continues with chords. The score is marked with "mf" and "mp" dynamics.

⁶ "Erlkönig" is a well-known dramatic Lied, or art song, by Franz Schubert.

⁷ Jeremy Ribando, interview by author, Niceville, FL, April 11, 2014.

The text itself catches the audience by surprise, and is validated when Ribando instructs the vocalist to pause and ask the pianist, “the stethoscope?”; at this moment the pianist responds in confirmation, thus adding to the humor and charade. The music continues with another strong flourishing chordal progression, with a sudden transition to 4/4 meter and a shift to a ragtime-like style. Ribando keeps the vocalist and audience in the dark with his text setting. The first line in this new section, “with a nurse maid waddle,” is repeated in question, and spoken by the vocalist in the same fashion as the opening lines of the song; in this case the pianist continues on, and brings the vocalist and audience in tow. It is apparent that the pianist and composer are joined together with their folly (Example 2). It is in the repetition of the second line, “and a shop girl simpler,” that we see the vocalist accept the nonsense and continue as if all is normal. There is a return of the flourishing chordal introduction, and a return to the original presentation of the stethoscope.

Example 2: “Academic” – mm. 39-42

The musical score for Example 2, "Academic" – mm. 39-42, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 39-40) shows the vocal line in treble clef and the piano accompaniment in bass clef. The vocal line begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and the lyrics "With a nurse - maid wad - dle". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system (mm. 41-42) continues the vocal line with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and the lyrics "with a nurse - maid wad - dle?". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern.

Having established a brief understanding of the overall framework of the piece, we will now break it down for ideal pedagogical application. This will cover the physical demands of the song, its artistic expectations, and musical complexities. The range of this song is from A-flat 2 to E-flat 4. Ribando did an excellent job with his text setting in placing an open vowel on the high note of the song, allowing for ease of placement for the vocalist; the vowels in this song

allow for a very colloquial way of singing. Though, as mentioned previously, there are moments that seem almost *colla voce* in design, the overall momentum of the piece is quite brisk. The piano introduction is marked “quickly and capriciously” with the quarter note equaling 189; it quickly switches to cut time with a half note equaling 126 and returning to 3/4 time and the quarter note equaling 189 just after the introductory vocal phrase. There is a reprise of the introductory motif followed by a shift to quarter note equals 120, and an indication to play in the style of a rag. This continues to the final phrase and a *ritardando* into quarter note equaling 100.

This quick tempo combined with the stylistic changes and the multiple meter changes can prove challenging initially, however, this song is an excellent tool for teaching these ideas; it is accessible, if somewhat difficult for the young vocalist. The phrases are all mostly short, primarily two-measure phrases with a few three- and four-measure phrases in the mix. This makes for a very singable piece, creating ease for the vocalist, and contributing to the cabaret style. Additionally, the shorter phrase lends itself to a lighter vocal mechanism; this is ideal for proper vocal production, as well as aiding the young vocalists’ confidence as they learn non-traditional singing styles. The song is set in an ABA’CB’ form, with the return sections being presented in a different key, yet similar enough to allow the vocalist to feel comfortable. Each vocal entrance is marked *mezzo forte*, aside from the climax of the poem and song which is marked *forte* with a rising line and *crescendo*. There are two *mezzo piano* markings, one when the vocalist is questioning the second line, and the other when the vocalist is setting up the final joke in the last phrase; this is followed by a direction for the punch line to be sung in a *sassy* fashion.

The artistic expectations set forth for the vocalist are two-fold; the first is evident in the musical writing, that being of two distinct styles. Initially, the music is presented in a more

classical setting, and then the music changes to a rag feel. Similarly, the second artistic expectation can be attributed to the fact that there are two character choices expected of the vocalist – first, to sing in a very serious classical style,⁸ and second, to switch to a more cabaret feel. Also, the vocalist is not initially “in on” the joke, which adds another level of character complexity; in addition, the pianist too has a character expectation in this song. Ribando does an excellent job of demonstrating these expectations in the music, through text as well as musical contour. The vocal line is rather accessible, with no major leaps; it sits in a very comfortable range, and the largest range change is approached in scale fashion. The most difficult part of the vocal line would be in the change to a rag and back again – however, this change is clearly led by the piano. The piano part holds considerably more complexity in that you will need a skilled pianist with sensitivity to the vocalist, and an understanding for the syncopations of the rag. This song is easily accessible to intermediate students who have strong musicianship; it is an ideal tool for aiding them as they branch out from traditional art song.

Ribando’s “The Cycle” is a completely different style of song – it is much more serious and deeper, both in text and music. The physical demands for the vocalist are much greater, however, it is still extremely accessible and singable, making Ribando’s prowess as a vocalist visible. The text of the poem is by Theodore Roethke; the text holds two representations – first it presents a detailed description of the cycle of water through the earth, second it represents the cycle of life. This song ranges from D3 to E4, the majority of which stays comfortably within the octave, with just a few moments where it approaches the *passaggio*. Looking to the vowel placement it is evident that Ribando has an intimate understanding of the human voice and the needs of a vocalist; the higher notes are all placed with open vowels, and approached with a

⁸ Jeremy Ribando, interview by author, Niceville, FL, April 11, 2014.

sense of ease. The most difficult approach would be in measure 36 (Example 3). Ribando has the vocalist moving up from A3 to D4 with a sixteenth rest in the middle of the word “loud,” however, he aides the vocalist by writing in a sliding grace note from the A to the D, and then resolves the sustained D4 to B3. Thus this becomes a stylistic choice, offsetting the textual motion.

Example 3: “The Cycle” – mm. 34-37

The musical score for Example 3, measures 34-37 of "The Cycle", is presented in 8/8 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "The air grew loose and I ... loud." The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. Measure 37 is marked with a circled 37 and a (3+3+1) annotation above the vocal staff.

Marked “slowly and ponderously” with the quarter note equaling 56, the momentum of the song changes between faster and slower in a natural, lifelike manner, and continuously returning to *a tempo*. The twelve tempo changes combined with the different time signature choices adds a level of complexity to the song. Furthermore, Ribando has given the pianist and vocalist different meters layered over each other, yet they are closely related, creating cohesion, while also showing natural juxtaposition. The song is through-composed, adding to the song’s complexity, enhanced by drastic meter and *tempi* changes. The phrase length fluctuates; however, they tend to be on the longer side, roughly 4 measures. Certain sections can be broken into sub-phrases to emphasis the text breaks, however, the overlying phrase structure is longer to match the poetic feel and the musical framework. Ribando creates an excellent setting for the poetry; his text painting fully captures Roethke’s idea of the primeval form of life. An excellent example of his text painting appears in measures 24-25 “The fine rain coiled in a cloud turned by

revolving air.” Here Ribando repeats the rhythmic idea, and inverts it in the two piano parts (Example 4).

Example 4: “The Cycle” – mm. 21-25

The musical score for Example 4, measures 21-25 of "The Cycle", is presented in 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "The fine rain" and continues with "coiled in a cloud Turned by re -". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *mf-f*, *f*, and *mp*. A "TAMBO I" marking is visible at the bottom right of the score.

The dynamic range covers the spectrum from *pianissimo* to *forte*, constantly matching the demands of the story and musical painting. The artistic expectations are precise and extensive; this is evident in the meticulous nature that Ribando has taken in placing his expression markings, and specific performance techniques, i.e., *senza vib.* — — *con vib.* (Example 5). The musical markings for the voice are few, almost mimicking the story line of the cycle, leaving the musical representation for a more organic approach. This changes in the last phrase, “under even a rock shut ground.” Ribando is very specific in the presentation here, scripting the finale; this creates an ethereal ending that binds the song organically to the core feeling of the text.

Example 5: “The Cycle” – m. 15

The musical score for Example 5, measure 15 of "The Cycle", is presented in 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "seize, ——— In". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and vibrato markings (*senza vib.* and *con vib.*).

From the onset the musical markings for the piano are clear and precise, and appear consistently throughout the song, primarily at the *tempi* changes. This is a necessary balance to

the organic musical presentation of the vocal line considering that the piano is creating the terrestrial foundation for the vocalist to stand on, and also guiding the musical texture of the cycle; the text painting happens first in the piano. The tempo, meter changes, dynamics, harmonic progression, and both vocal and musical contour build the mystical feeling that “The Cycle” represents, drawing the audience into a different world. The musical complexity in this song is abundant, however, it is easily approachable to the intermediate and advanced vocalist. The vocal line sits comfortably between D3 and D4 consistently, with one venture up to E4; this kind of easy and gentle range makes the musical phrasing easy to approach, and gives the song an organic and visceral feeling. This song’s complexity lends itself to being an ideal addition to the vocal studio for teaching. Several of the complicated performing styles that present themselves in music are present in this song, and therefore could easily be taught through the practice and preparation of this song for performance. The slow *tempi*, as well as the fluctuation of *tempi* throughout this piece, are something many vocalists tend to struggle with in early training, whether for reasons of wanting to rush, not counting and relying on feel, or the fact that, as in this song, it changes frequently. However, this song is an excellent tool to aid in the mastery of this technical issue.

Additionally, this song has some vocal syncopations, often on a secondary vocal entrance in the middle of a phrase, as in measure 12, or as the pick-up to a new phrase, as in measure 34. There are also quick and rhythmic text choices where each 16th note in a run has a word (Example 6); traditional vocal lines would often make these flourishes on a vowel for ease, however, Ribando uses them to add energy and trepidation to a moment and idea. This can aid a

young vocalist in understanding the idea and style of patter-singing without having to master a Donizetti *cavatina*⁹ as his or her first attempt.

Example 6: “The Cycle” – m. 10



Similar to the previously-mentioned *tempi* changes are the frequent meter changes; the vocalist and pianist alike must consistently be prepared for a shift in meter, and at moments, in musical expression because of the meter change. This can be used as a tool for a developing vocalist to find his or her inner pulse, and develop a sensitivity to a shift in meter while maintaining this sense of pulse.

Building on the importance of the meter in a vocalist’s training, Ribando has also, at moments, placed the piano line and the vocal line in different meters. For example, in measure 28 the voice is in 2/4 and the piano is in 6/8 (Example 7); here we are in two different forms of two, however, both musicians must be able to sustain the pulse of two, while hearing and keeping a sense of duple over triple.

⁹ A *cavatina* is a type of aria form, and the composer, Donizetti, typically uses melismas in his arias. The *cavatina* aria refers to a principal character’s opening aria.

Example 7: “The Cycle” – m. 28

Tempo I ♩ = 56 ca.

Far from that col - der

♩ = 56 ca.

molto legato

This musical score for measure 28 is written for voice and piano. The voice part is in 7/8 time, indicated by a '7' over the staff. The piano accompaniment is in 6/8 time. The tempo is marked 'Tempo I' with a quarter note equal to 56 beats per minute (ca.). The lyrics 'Far from that col - der' are written below the voice staff. The piano part is marked 'molto legato'.

This in itself is one of the most complex ideas within this piece, however necessary for the contour, and one of the reasons why this song is invaluable to the teaching studio. Another teaching opportunity in this song is the uneven meter, meaning 7/8 with a directional marking of (3+3+1). This style of meter is common in 21st-century music, yet is not often seen in earlier music, especially vocal music (Example 8). This is seen in measure 37 coming out of a standard duple meter. Ribando brings this style back again in measure 42, however, this time we are in a 6/8 meter, also a form of duple meter; Ribando departs from the normal (3+3) division here and designates it as (2+3+1) (Example 9). This style of writing forces the musician out of the comfort of feeling, and requires a constant pulse. Mastering this style, and using this song to teach this kind of counting while still remaining musical, is a tool that will set a musician apart as a performer.

Example 8: “The Cycle” – m. 37

37

(3+3+1)

This musical score for measure 37 shows a voice staff with a whole rest and a piano staff. The piano staff is in 7/8 time, with a directional marking '(3+3+1)' indicating the meter. The measure number '37' is written above the voice staff.

Example 9: “The Cycle” – m. 42

42

(2+3+1)

This musical score for measure 42 shows a voice staff with a whole rest and a piano staff. The piano staff is in 6/8 time, with a directional marking '(2+3+1)' indicating the meter. The measure number '42' is written above the voice staff.

Jody Nagel: *Four Songs for Seth and Six Epitaphs*

Jody Nagel (b. 1960) is an award-winning composer of international acclaim. He received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Composition from The University of Texas at Austin, Master of Arts degree in Music Theory and Composition from The University of Pittsburgh, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from Marietta College. He has studied with renowned composers Eugene Kurtz, Dan Welcher, Donald Grantham, Russell Pinkston, Karl Korte, Morton Subotnick, Peter Sculthorpe, Stephen Montague, Wayne Slawson, John Peel, William Buelow, and David Berlin. Among his many accolades include American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) awards, among them that he has been a perennial recipient, since 1996, of the ASCAP Standard Music Awards,¹⁰ and he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship, to name a few. His compositions have also gained high praise in performance at the Society of Composers, Inc. (SCI) and Society of Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS). Nagel has had commissions and compositions performed internationally in many countries such as the United States, Australia, Russia, Korea, Germany, Austria, Canada, Costa Rica, Israel, and many more. Nagel's catalogue of music is vast and inclusive of all instruments and styles. Dr. Nagel is currently Professor of Music Theory and Composition at Ball State University.

Four Songs for Seth is a set of four short songs written by Nagel. They are: "Is that a new star?," "This butterfly," "A handful of sand," and "I placed my Mother on my back." The texts of these songs are in the style of a haiku and three waku.¹¹ The subject matter ranges from sketches

¹⁰ Jody Nagel, "Bio," <http://www.jomarpress.com/nagel/nagel.html> [accessed April 7, 2018.]

¹¹ A haiku is a poem consisting of seventeen syllables in three lines of five, seven, and five. A waku is a Japanese poem in five lines and a free-form.

of observation in nature to dramatic life moments. The range in this set is from C3 to E-flat 4. Nagel keeps the vocal line in a comfortable and natural range with one major leap to the high E-flat in “Is that a new star?” Otherwise, the changes in tessitura are easily approached, and guided by musical contour. The vocal line alone is easy to approach because Nagel is conscious of the natural flow of the text, and has a strong understanding of the poetic forms of Haiku and Waku; he also sets the vocalist up with clear musical directions (shown here in italics) that match the text for each song, such as *Flowing and twinkling* for “Is that a new star?,” *Flitting, but not too fast* for “This butterfly,” *Pouring, as sand through an hourglass* for “A handful of sand,” and *Playful, but ultimately tragic* for “I placed my Mother on my back.” However, the songs themselves are not easy as seen by the wide range of *tempi*, and a constantly-changing meter. These songs make an excellent first cycle for a young vocalist, however, they take serious focus and discipline to perform.

Six Epitaphs is a song comprised of six miniature movements, titled: “Miss Mimsey Star,” “Old Martin Hupp,” “Reggie,” “Captain Gregg,” “Poor dear Blanche,” and “Professor Munch.” The texts of this song are based on the lyrics of Cole Porter and present a humorous look at the various deaths of these six people. For example, Martin Hupp tried to cross a drawbridge while it was up and Captain Gregg died from termites eating his wooden leg and so-forth. The range of this song is from C3 to D4, with an overall easy *tessitura*. There are a few more complicated intervals in this piece, however, which aid in creating the musical contour as it relates to the text. Each movement is presented in a different tempo with the tempo markings ranging from 92 to 126. This variation in *tempi* would not be difficult aside from the fact that each movement, sans the last two, is approached *attaca*. Each movement also holds its own melodic contour as it relates to the epitaph being presented. This song is highly suited for an

advanced vocalist, and for an upper-level intermediate vocalist looking to explore new styles and multi-movement works.

Gene Sheer: “At Howard Hawks’ House” and “Omaha Beach”

Gene Scheer (b. 1958) is an American composer, librettist, lyricist, and vocalist. He holds Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in Vocal Performance, both from the Eastman School of Music. Scheer spent eight years in Vienna performing in musicals. During this time he began to try his hand as a lyricist.¹² He has written songs for great American vocalists such as Renée Fleming, Denyce Graves, and Nathan Gunn.

“At Howard Hawks’ House” from *Voices from World War II* is written in the swing style, with a range of A2 to F4. This song is written in a quick four-beat tempo, with much syncopation in the accompaniment. The vocal line showcases a large range, and a very complex contour. The vocal line is chromatic in sections, and though well-supported by the piano line is very harmonically challenging to the ear. Another difficult aspect in this song is that the vocalist must represent several different voices. The vocalist is primarily singing the voice of Sergeant Mysak, who for the majority of the tune is a fun-loving Marine on liberty, but must also sing with the resolve of a Marine headed to war as represented in a quotation of the “Marine Hymn.” The vocalist must also sing with a representation of Evelyn Keyes and Howard Hawks, from the perspective of Mysak recounting his experience. These traits make this song quite complex, and therefore reserved for the more advanced vocalist, however, these traits are similar to those of Schubert’s “Erlkönig,” just in a more American jazz flavor and therefore can be applied to the teaching and performing repertoire accordingly.

¹² Brandon Hendrickson, *A Performer’s Guide to Gene Scheer’s Voices from World War II* (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2011), 5.

“Omaha Beach” is one of the strongest and most sobering songs in *Voices from World War II*. The text for this song is a chilling recount of a soldier’s experience invading Omaha Beach on D-Day. There are two major sections of text – a free-form section where the events of the day are described in detail, and a bone-chilling, hymn-like section that is repeated three times throughout the song. Scheer creates an ethereal environment with a marking of *Freely* and *colla voce* together, and cluster chords in the piano. The range of this song is A2 to F4, with the majority of the song sitting easily in the tessitura just below the *passaggio*. These *colla voce* sections are separated by a hymn-like¹³ interlude that returns three times and is marked *tempo, but slowly*; it is haunting and sacred. This song would be an excellent tool for teaching a young vocalist how to sing *recitative*¹⁴ while alternating with sung verse, and being both musically and textually expressive in the *recitative*.

Conclusion

The balance of difficulty, accessibility, and musicality found within the repertoire of these select composers is evidence of their necessary place in the vocal studio, and their ability to aid the young vocalist in flourishing as he or she works to develop the vocal mechanism. It is imperative, if we are to expect the vocal catalogue to continue to grow, that we encourage students to study more than the tried-and-true art song of centuries past, but to also explore the music of current composers, as well as that of their own colleagues in school. To further aid in this growth, teachers and pedagogues too need to broaden their knowledge and understanding of contemporary composers. Further, the current trend in the universities and conservatories to be

¹³ Brandon Hendrickson, *A Performer’s Guide to Gene Scheer’s Voices from World War II* (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2011) 43.

¹⁴ Ibid, 41.

on the cutting edge, and the bureaucratic demand for music programs to graduate students at the same rate as a traditional academic program, can benefit from the application of contemporary music alongside traditional repertoire. In fact, the more new music is seen in a program, the potential to attract prominent composers and scholars is broadened, opening the door for funding and grants. Similarly, in a climate where we are expected to push our students to graduate in four years or less, we can benefit from exposing the student to advanced techniques, encouraging faster development of the vocal mechanism through the use of these contemporary songs. That being said, this project is in no way condoning the end to the study and use of earlier works in the vocal studio; it is absolutely necessary that these works continue to be studied, performed, and applied as they always have been, perhaps even more so for the purpose of technical study and understanding. The point here is that these contemporary works can stand alongside the tried-and-true works, and add a fresh perspective to teaching and performance. It is the goal of this project to serve as a reference to the studio teacher for the purpose of bridging the gap, and inspiring a pursuit of contemporary vocal art song.

Bibliography

- Beeman, Shellie A. "Exploring 21st-Century Vocal Music: Highlighting the Music of Joshua Hummel and Jody Nagel." Doctor of Arts Lecture Recital, Ball State University, Muncie, March 28, 2014.
- Hendrickson, Brandon. *A Performer's Guide to Gene Scheer's Voices from World War II*. DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2011.
- Huntington, Tammie M. *Performance Practice of Jody Nagel's Opera Fifty-Third Street: World Première Performance at Ball State University*. DA diss., Ball State University, 2008.
- Lamperti, Giovanni Battista. *Vocal wisdom: maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti*. New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1931.
- Nagel, Jody. 2014. Interview by author, Muncie, IN, November 14.
- Nagel, Jody. "Bio." Accessed April 7, 2018. <http://www.jomarpress.com/nagel/nagel.html>
- Nagel, Jody. "Four Songs for Seth," Jomar Press, 2011.
- Nagel, Jody. "Six Epitaphs," Jomar Press, 2011.
- Ribando, Jeremy. 2014. Interview by author, Niceville, FL, April 11.
- Ribando, Jeremy S. "Academic," score, 2003, manuscript.
- Ribando, Jeremy. "Faculty Bio," Accessed February 7, 2018. <http://nwfraiders.org/faculty/profiles/ribando-jeremy/>
- Ribando, Jeremy S. "The Cycle," score, 2003, manuscript.
- Scheer, Gene. "Bio." Accessed January 7, 2018. <http://genescheer.com/>
- Scheer, Gene. *Voices from World War II*, Gene Ink Publications, 2000.
- Spaniola, Joseph T. 2014. Interview by author, Pensacola, FL, April 12.
- Spaniola, Joseph T. "Brief Biography," "Selected Works." Accessed January 7, 2018. <http://www.josephspaniola.com/>
- Spaniola, Joseph T. "Letters from a Friend," score, 1987, manuscript.
- Trubow, Valentina N. *Musical Expression and Meaning through Analysis: a Vocalist's Perspective of Jody Nagel's Song "Troubles."* Master's Creative Project, Ball State University, 2003.